



Approved for Release CIA Historical Collections
Division AR 70-14 1OCT2013

Directorate of Intelligence
19 December 1991

Bosnia-Herzegovina: On the Edge of the Abyss

Summary

The violence in Croatia has reached Bosnia-Herzegovina's doorstep and the frequency of incidents spilling over Bosnia-Herzegovina's borders is growing. Tension has also been building in Bosnia-Herzegovina proper, especially in Old Herzegovina. The grip of moderate leaders, like republic President Alija Izetbegovic, who have worked to maintain Bosnia-Herzegovina's neutrality, is slipping and the republic's government and Territorial Defense Forces are fracturing along ethnic and religious lines. If serious violence breaks out in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is likely to involve more factions and be even less controllable than the ongoing conflict in Croatia.

Although there is still a glimmer of hope that the conflict in Yugoslavia can be worked out along the lines proposed by the EC, the prospects of Bosnia-Herzegovina emerging with its current borders intact seems increasingly remote. The most positive outcome we foresee is one in which the moderates manage to guide the republic through a "negotiated division" with Serbian areas uniting with Serbia, Croatian enclaves joining Croatia, and the Muslims joining either Croatia or carving out an Islamic state from what remains.

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted]
Office of European Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may
be directed to the Chief, East European Division, EURA, on [redacted]

EUR M-91-20247

SECRET

In either case, the future of the Muslim community will be central to the question of how Bosnia-Herzegovina will be organized in the future. Some Muslim community leaders have warned that if Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslims become involved in the fighting, the violence will spread to the Muslim communities in Sandjak, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia. Should Bosnia-Herzegovina go the way of Croatia, the fighting is most likely to be initiated by local Serbs, probably in the Old Herzegovina area, who, following the pattern in Croatia, would then be supported by the JNA.

Multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina is a Yugoslavia in miniature. Its population of four million is fragmented into Slavic Muslim, Serbian, and Croat communities, which respectively comprise 43, 31, and 17 percent of the population. Its government is in theory an unwieldy coalition of the leaders of the three major ethnic communities. In practice, it has functioned sporadically since October 1991, when Serb representatives withdrew from the assembly.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is at the center of every Yugoslav doomsday scenario. It was Yugoslavia's killing ground in World War II, with Croatian Ustase and Muslim guerrillas battling Communist Partisans and Serbian Chetniks in a vicious three-cornered struggle. It has escaped major violence during the latest conflict, in large part because memories of past bloodletting are still fresh enough to serve as a deterrent.

Republic President Alija Izetbegovic, a moderate Muslim, has worked to promote a general settlement that would hold Yugoslavia together and keep Bosnia-Herzegovina out of the fighting. Izetbegovic has stressed that preserving some approximation of the status quo is the best possible solution for Bosnia-Herzegovina because its crazy quilt population distribution defies simple solutions. Serbs, Croats, and Muslims hold clear majorities in some areas, but those areas are not always contiguous. Moreover, the groups are thoroughly interspersed in most areas. (see map A)

Izetbegovic and other moderates now see events slipping out of their control. In addition to the breakdown of the republic's carefully constructed coalition government, a similar process is underway in what remains of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Territorial Defense Force. Serbs in several regions, including

the Bosnian Krajina, Old Hercegovina, and scattered smaller areas have declared autonomy, adopted constitutions, and elected their own officials. Croats in west Hercegovina have now done the same.

The EC decision--spurred by German pressure--to consider international recognition for any republic that requests it by 23 December could bring the Bosnian crisis to a head. Izetbegovic faces an unpalatable choice between remaining in a "Yugoslavia" limited to no more than Serbia and its Montenegrin ally or opting for independence even at the risk of igniting civil war in his republic.

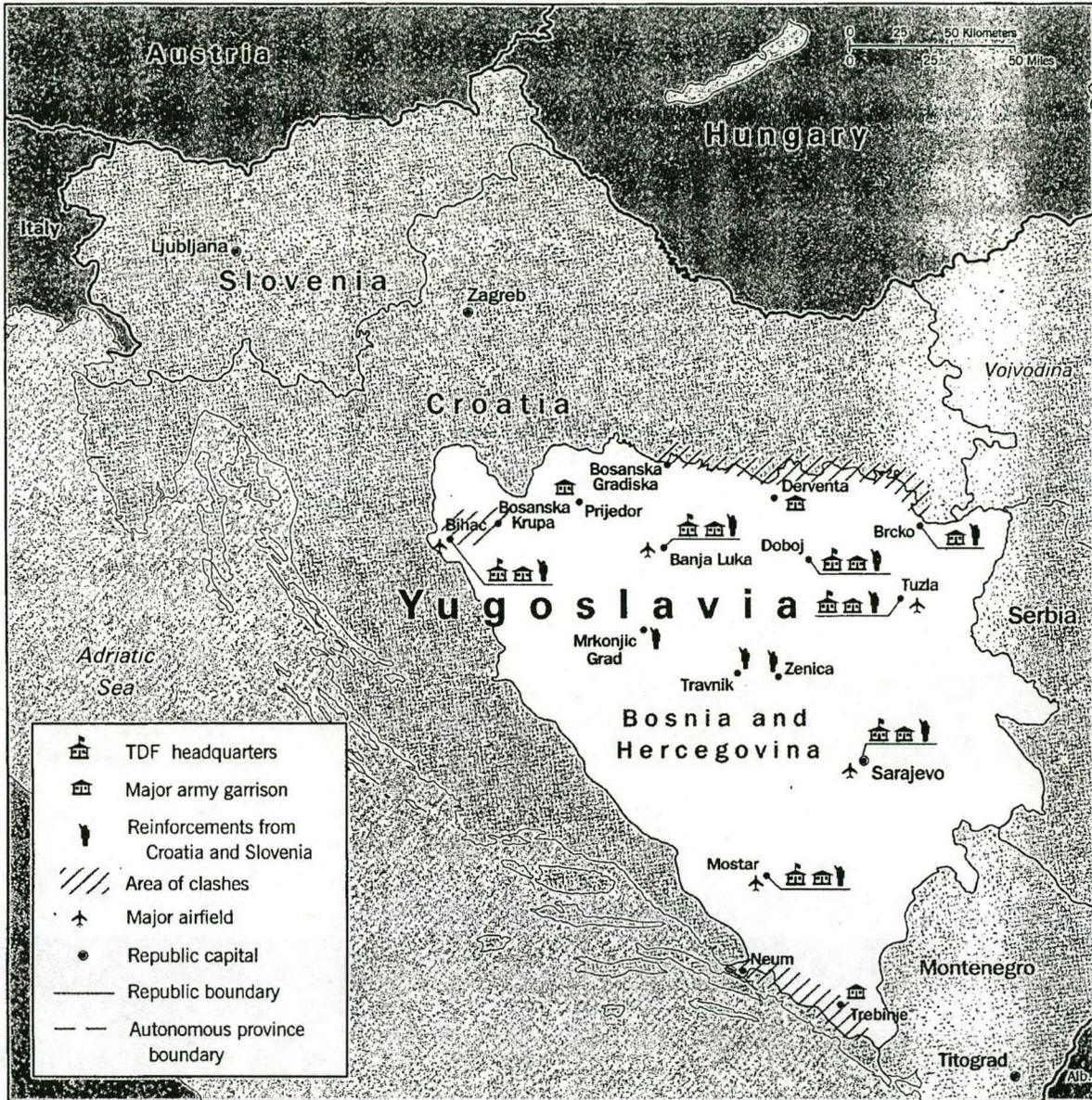
The Military Situation

If serious violence gets underway in Bosnia-Hercegovina, the Serbs will have the support of local JNA commanders. We believe that Serb irregular units have received arms and ammunition from the JNA. The situation is already tense. Travel at night has become impossible--local Serb groups have been establishing roadblocks and going on nighttime shooting sprees in Croat and Muslim villages and neighborhoods. The Muslims and Croats repeatedly have claimed that the Army is driving Croats and Muslims from ethnically mixed regions. EC monitors have reported particular hot spots near Bihac, along the Sava river border with Croatia, and in the Neretva valley near Neum. (See Map B)

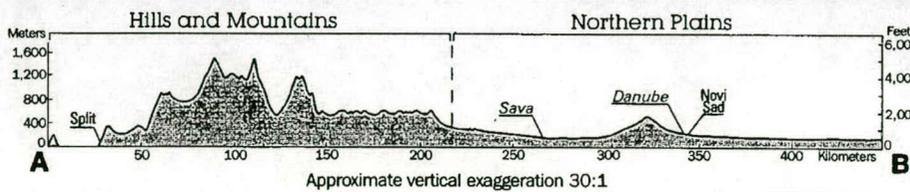
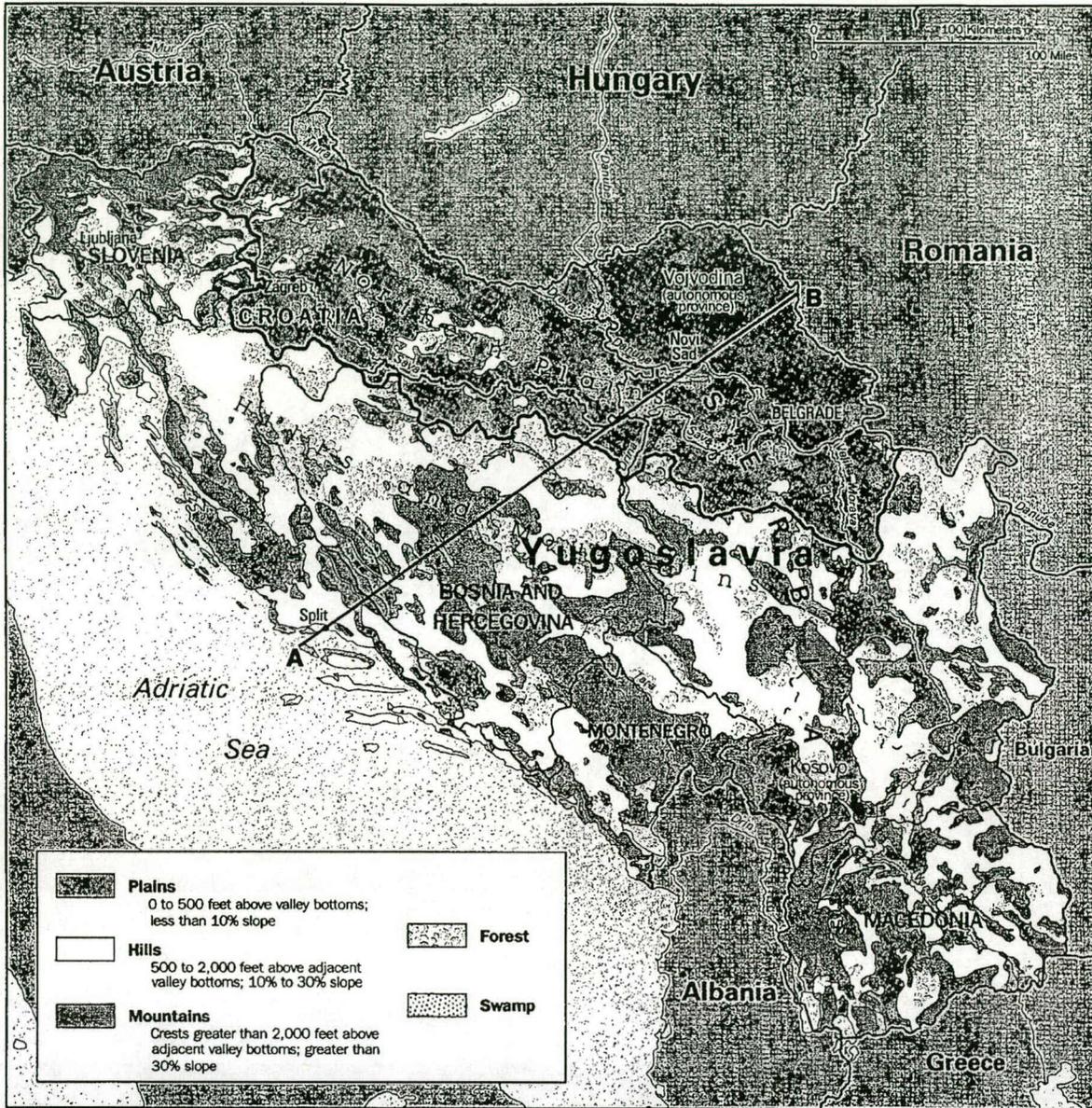
The Army is the dominant military force in Bosnia-Hercegovina. Army units in the republic have been reinforced by elements of some ten armored, motorized, and artillery brigades withdrawn from Croatia and Slovenia. Federal strength in the area has been boosted to some 50,000 men and hundreds of tanks and combat vehicles. The bulk of these forces are deployed to garrisons in northern Bosnia from which they have operated against Croatia. Unlike the open plains of Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina's rugged terrain would preclude large-scale armored operations and probably would exacerbate the Army's command, control, and communications problems. Large-scale violence probably would strain its capabilities and force it to limit its objectives. (See map C)

The Army, in our view, almost certainly would make a major effort to secure road and rail lines of communication between major cities and Serb-populated areas. Federal forces probably would set their sights on maintaining control of Serb-majority areas through aggressive patrolling and deployments from current bases. They also are likely to harrass and drive out suspect Croats and Muslims, a process certain to inspire local resistance. The republic government commands few armed men and almost certainly could not conduct a coordinated defense against the federal army. The 200,000-man Territorial Defense Force (TDF)--a lightly armed infantry force trained for guerrilla

Military Disposition in Bosnia and Hercegovina, 18 December 1991



Military Terrain of Yugoslavia



SOURCE: DMA ONC

warfare--has fractured along ethnic lines. Some TDF units in Serb areas such as Banja Luka and eastern Hercegovina have re-subordinated themselves to the Army. Only a few may remain under Sarajevo's control. The bulk of TDF units probably are responding only to local commanders, increasing the risk of clashes between TDF units or with Army troops. []

A heavily armed civilian populace and profusion of paramilitary groups virtually ensure that conflict in Bosnia-Hercegovina would be characterized by widespread and chaotic skirmishing. Estimates of the number of armed individuals vary widely, ranging from 20,000-100,000. A recent republic Interior Ministry report charged that Serbs, equipped with Army weapons, have organized the most local paramilitary units, but Embassy reporting makes clear that Croats and Muslims are arming themselves as well. Information about the Muslim community's capabilities is most sketchy. Izetbegovic has denied that his party, the Muslim SDA, has arms or a militia, but other SDA officials have stressed that they will fight back if attacked. []

Dividing the Spoils

Bosnia-Hercegovina's prospects are dim even if Serbia and Croatia move towards a settlement. Intelligence and press reports indicate that both Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman are eyeing annexation of parts of Bosnia-Hercegovina to their respective territories. Moreover, reports indicate the two sides have remained in sporadic contact on this subject despite their conflict. Last summer [] Tudjman told visiting German politicians that Bosnia-Hercegovina was absurdly large and that, in principle, he favored dividing it. Tudjman subsequently disavowed these views when challenged by US officials and [] there is no support in the Croatian cabinet for annexing parts of Bosnia-Hercegovina. []

Despite these disavowals, however, we believe that Bosnia-Hercegovina continues to figure prominently in the Croatian leadership's thinking. For Milosevic it is a question of realizing his plan for a "greater Serbia" that would bring all Serb-populated areas under Belgrade's roof. We believe Tudjman may be calculating that picking up parts of Bosnia-Hercegovina will make it easier politically to give up some Croatian territory under Serb occupation in an eventual settlement. []

And the Muslims As the Losers

Both Milosevic and Tudjman have spoken of plans by "some Muslims" to create an Islamic fundamentalist state in the region. Tudjman has not shown any particular concern about such an outcome. Muslims and Croats fought together against Serbs in the last war, and Croat leaders still see the Muslims

as allies against the Serbs. Croat leaders have told US officials that they believe Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslims would opt to join Croatia if asked to choose between Croatia and Serbia.

For Milosevic and the Serbs, on the other hand, the possibility of an Islamic fundamentalist state is a source of anxiety because they see it as a possible entry point for radical Arab influence. Milosevic may secretly hope that Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslims eventually ask to join Croatia. He is already concerned about having to deal with large Muslim communities in Sandjak, as well as in Montenegro and Macedonia.

Some Scenarios

We believe pessimism is in order, but disaster is not necessarily inevitable. At least four possible scenarios are conceivable.

- **Widespread violence and civil conflict.** At the present juncture, this outcome appears most likely. The decision of Germany and the other EC states to recognize the independence of the Yugoslav republics probably will prompt the Serb and Croat areas to attach their respective territories to Serbia and Croatia. This could set a chain reaction of violence in motion as local groups seek to promote or prevent annexation.
- **Conditions that permit cooler heads to prevail.** A decision to send UN observers to Bosnia-Herzegovina might have such an effect. This might stabilize the situation even though violence is likely to continue to flare up along Bosnia-Herzegovina's borders and incidents will crop up in the republic's tense areas. This probably would lead over time to a "cantonal" solution in which the various communities fenced themselves off from each other. Its long-term viability, however, is uncertain.
- **A negotiated division of Bosnia-Herzegovina.** This outcome would permit the Serbs and Croats to satisfy their ambitions and leave the Muslims to choose between joining Croatia or forming a Muslim state in what would be left of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This would be extremely difficult to achieve, given the republic's patchwork ethnic distribution. Even assuming that all of the players have the best intentions, it could not be carried out without extensive population shifts. In addition, we suspect that this would be unstable. The Muslim state would probably soon come under pressure from internal disputes between secular and fundamental factions and a nervous and potentially hostile Serbia.

- **Lord Carrington's favored option.** The maintenance of Bosnia-Herzegovina within a loose confederation with the other Yugoslav Republics is increasingly in doubt. The fighting in Croatia has produced fear and mistrust among all of Yugoslavia's ethnic groups and almost destroyed support for even a loosely united state.

Outlook

It is hard to envisage a happy outcome for Bosnia-Herzegovina even if the fighting in Croatia ends relatively quickly. Even the most optimistic, albeit less likely, outcome we can currently foresee--a negotiated dissolution--would carry high social costs. Unless a solution can be found to the broader Yugoslav problem which preserves economic links between the Yugoslav republics, an economically viable Bosnia seems unobtainable. It would either fall under the sway of Serbia or Croatia or look beyond the Balkan peninsula to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, or Libya for economic, political, and perhaps military support.

Izetbegovic already has accepted financial assistance from Libya but demurred on military aid. We believe that at least some Bosnians might turn to Qadhafi and other radical Islamic states if help were not immediately forthcoming from other sources. This would add an Islamic-Christian element to the bubbling Balkans cauldron.